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Having an Abortion? Your Guide to Good Care

*Is abortion legal in my state?
Where can I get one?
Do I need my parents' permission?
How much does it cost?
What will it be like?*

These are only a few of the questions people ask us each day on our national hotline. They are important questions to ask - especially now, because getting an abortion has become a little more confusing. Here are a few of the reasons why:

State Laws Vary. Every state has its own laws about abortion. Some states have laws that make it fairly easy to get an abortion. Others have laws that make it very hard, especially for women who are in their teens, who don't have much money, or who have passed the 12-14th weeks of pregnancy.

Abortions Are Concentrated in Metropolitan Areas. Most abortion services are located in or near large towns or cities, so women who live in non-urban areas often have to travel to obtain abortion services.

Some People Are Fighting To Stop Abortion. The news is full of stories about debates in Congress and state legislatures. Sometimes it's hard to know what's law and what's just talk. Also, people who don't agree with abortion have told a lot of lies, saying that "abortion is dangerous," and that "women always regret their abortions." In fact, abortion is one of the safest surgical procedures. After having abortions, most women feel they made the right decision.

Remember: abortion is legal in the U.S.

This brochure will give you a general idea of what you need to know when seeking abortion services. The more questions you ask, the better informed you will be about your abortion and the medical facility you are considering.

Finding a Doctor and Facility

Abortions are performed in a variety of settings: clinics, surgi-centers, private physicians' offices, and in certain cases, hospitals.

In general, medical and osteopathic doctors perform abortions. Make sure the person performing the abortion has these qualifications:

- She or he should be a physician who is licensed by the state. In a few states, other medical professionals may perform

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Our [hotline](#) operator can tell you the names of qualified abortion providers near you.

First: Tests and Counseling

Before performing an abortion, the provider should:

- Confirm your pregnancy with a pregnancy test and internal examination, even if that has been done elsewhere;
- Test your blood for anemia and RH factor; and
- Inform you about any other tests you will need.

In addition, someone should:

- Explain the abortion procedure and what to expect;
 - Make sure you understand any risks in the procedure you will be having;
 - Answer all your questions; and
 - Explore with you your feelings about your decision.
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The Abortion Procedure

As mentioned, the doctor or a counselor should explain exactly how the abortion will be performed. Nearly all abortions take place between 7 and 13 weeks (first trimester) of pregnancy, when the standard method is vacuum aspiration or suction curettage. This method is safely performed on an out-patient basis.

Having A First Trimester Abortion. You will lie on an examining table, just as you would for a routine pelvic exam. The doctor inserts a closed speculum into the vagina, opens it to hold the vaginal walls apart, and usually numbs the cervix with a local anesthetic. Then the physician gradually widens (dilates) the cervix.

When the opening is about as big around as a drinking straw, the physician inserts a small tube attached to an aspirator machine (similar to the one dentists use to clear the mouth of saliva). The machine's suction empties the contents of the uterus through the tube. Then the doctor carefully checks the walls of the uterus with a small, spoon-shaped instrument to be sure no tissue remains.

The entire procedure usually takes 10-20 minutes and is usually followed by some vaginal bleeding. Some women experience pain - especially menstrual-type cramping - during the procedure and for up to an hour afterward.

Second Trimester Abortion. If you are a little more than 12 or 13 weeks pregnant, the doctor will probably use a method called dilatation and evacuation (D&E). The procedure is nearly the same as described above, but the fetus is larger, and so the procedure is somewhat more complex:

- Dilatation takes a little longer, sometimes overnight.
- The doctor will probably use forceps in addition to suction.

Note: These descriptions do not apply to the few percent of second trimester abortions that are performed by induction.

There may be reasons for you to go to the hospital, but most D&E's are performed in out-patient settings.

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using them, their effects, and the amount you will be charged.

Anesthesia. Most abortions are performed with a local anesthetic because it is safer and less expensive. Occasionally there are medical reasons to "put you to sleep" with a general anesthetic. If the provider suggests that, discuss the reasons and extra cost.

Recovery. After the abortion is completed, the facility should provide a recovery area where you can rest for a while before you go home. During this time, the staff will make sure your blood pressure and heart rate are stable and that you're not having abnormal bleeding or discomfort. Someone should also be available to talk with you about your abortion, your plans for birth control, or any other concerns you are having.

Planning For The Day Itself. On the day you go for the abortion, you should expect to be at the facility for several hours. Since much of that time will be spent waiting, you may want to bring a friend and something to do.

After Your Abortion: Follow-Up Care

24-Hour Answering Service. Although complications are unlikely, you need to find out what to do in case they arise. The provider should give you a 24-hour number to call. The first place to call with problems is the facility that performed the abortion. If you need emergency care, they can best determine what you need and help arrange it.

Instructions. The provider should also:

- Explain what to expect and how to take care of yourself after the abortion; and
- Provide a counselor who will be available in case you want to talk further about your abortion or birth control plan.

Medication. If the provider gives you medication or a prescription, be sure you understand the reasons for it, how and when to take it, and any effects it may have.

Follow-Up Exam. Even if you feel fine afterwards, it's very important to return for an exam within a few weeks to make sure the abortion is complete and there are no hidden problems. It is best to go to the same facility, but if you have traveled a long distance, they can help you make arrangements to have the follow-up exam closer to home.

Fees

Most providers expect you to pay in full at the time of the procedure. In some facilities, the fee covers everything; in other facilities, it doesn't. Therefore, asking "How much does the abortion cost?" may not give you all the information you need.

Ask what they will charge for:

- Lab work
- Abortion procedure
- Anesthetic
- Other medication
- Prescriptions
- Birth control
- Follow-up exam

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If You Receive Medicaid. Call the [hotline](#) to find out whether Medicaid covers abortion in your state. If it does, the hotline operator can give you the name of facilities that accept Medicaid payment.

If You Don't Have Enough Money. Some facilities have funds to help cover abortions for women who can't pay. It's worth asking.

If You Are 18 Or Under. Some states allow teenagers (minors) to make their own decision about abortion. Some, however, require you to notify one or both parents ("parental notification"); others require you to obtain your parents' permission ("parental consent").

Ordinarily it's a good idea for teens to involve their parents or some caring adult friend, and most do. But if you have important reasons not to involve them, and you live in a state that requires parental consent, you may be able to go to court and ask the judge to give you permission instead. You can get more information by calling the hotline, or talking with the counselor at the abortion facility or Planned Parenthood.

Birth Control

Shortly after you have had your abortion, you will be capable of getting pregnant again. This is a good time and place to explore ways to prevent that - to choose a method of birth control that is suitable for you.

Your abortion facility should:

- Provide complete information about birth control;
- Discuss your needs and habits; and
- Help you choose and obtain the most appropriate method for you.

You have a right to a safe, legal abortion.

Abortion is legal in the United States. When it is performed properly by trained professionals, it is also safe. Your first job is to find a medical facility that will give you the best possible service. Your second job is to inform yourself. Don't hesitate to ask questions, even ones you may have already asked but need to discuss again. The more relaxed you are and the more you understand what to expect, the better and safer your experience will be.

If you need information or a referral to a qualified provider, call the abortion hotline:

(800) 772-9100

Monday - Friday 9am to 7pm Eastern Time.

